

It's better for kids to keep busy

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Children likely have no idea what to expect from a major hurricane and could very well be frightened. To cut down on your child's anxiety, not to mention the cries of "I'm bored," here is a list of things to prepare them for a hurricane and to keep them entertained.

Explain hurricanes

Tell your children that a hurricane is a giant, rainy windstorm that requires a lot of preparation and precaution.

The more children know about the storm and safety procedures, the more confident they will be. But keep it simple; detailed information is useless if children can't digest it.

Younger children may have trouble understanding the idea of a hurricane. Talk to them instead about its effects and that it could leave them without electricity.

Using a map, help older children name the states and cities where hurricanes are likely to strike. Have them mark where you live in the hurricane zone.

Ask children, whatever their age, to make a list of what they do during a typical day. Explain to them that those activities might change if a hurricane hits: School might close; they may not get to play outside; they may have to eat different foods.

Involve kids in prep

It's important for children to feel they are a part of the preparations. Allow children to help plan and pack safety kits, help check hurricane shutters and make preparations for their pets.

Children should be reminded of their hurricane lessons throughout the year; a crash course in hurricanes only hours before one arrives may cause them to panic.

As a part of the preparation process, your child can pack a supply kit equipped with all the soothing items they might take on an overnight stay at Grandma's.

Give them a checklist of things to gather. Some suggestions: games, toys, blankets, stuffed animals, favorite books, favorite snacks, a toothbrush and toothpaste, rain gear, paper and pencils, coloring books, a flashlight.

Plan fun activities

■ **Card games.** Games and puzzles are a good way to pass the time. As preparation for the storm, research new card games

on the internet and print directions. Gather the family and learn the rules together.

■ **Build a fort.** Pillows. Check. Blankets. Check. Sofa cushions. Check. Dining room chairs. Check. Hours of fun. Check.

■ **Play flashlight tag.** Stock up on as many batteries as you can find before the storm. Flashlight tag is an oldie but goodie and will have parents giggling like schoolgirls along with their kids. Some variations to try: Leave the flashlights on and allow the hiding players to change positions as they see the "It" person approaching. Players also can be put in "jail," where they can be rescued.

■ **Conduct a scavenger hunt.** With or without a flashlight, searching the house for treasure can keep kids (and parents) busy for hours. And it's so much more fun to bump around in the dark to find that long lost doll or forgotten box of toy cars. Some variations to try: Hide pieces of a puzzle around the house (be sure to keep count). When you've found all of the pieces, you have another project to work on. You can also use your digital camera as part of the fun. Take a picture of something — make sure it is cropped closely and isn't too easily identifiable — and ask the other players to find it.

■ **Cook with them.** Choose meals that are easy to prepare and let your kids help cook. No power? Get the fireplace or grill going and everyone can cook their own hot dogs on a stick. Don't forget the s'mores for dessert.

■ **Devour the ice cream.** There's no better excuse than a dead freezer to demolish your ice cream supply. Since the best way to conserve your freezer's chill is to keep the door closed, have someone time your mad dash for sugar.

Make the door opening excursion count by making a list before the storm of all the freezer items you should eat. A few frozen peas on top of that sundae might make for an interesting round of Truth or Dare.

Talk to your children

Before, during and after the storm, it's important to talk to your children, according to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Encourage them to ask questions and express concerns. Reassure them that they are safe, stay upbeat, keep them busy and maintain regular family routines.

Children are influenced by the adults around them, so remaining calm and staying aware of adult conversations about the hurricane's aftermath will help your child weather any storm.

Food-prep checklist

As hurricane season draws near, it's time to check and double-check your food and water supplies. Keep the following in mind:

Hurricane food prep by the numbers

- 1 gallon water per person per day (don't forget pets!). Don't forget: Your tap water is still safe to drink, it's only dicey after a power outage. Fill clean pitchers and water bottles now. Also, you can fill freezer bags with water and freeze them ahead of time. Just let them thaw in a water pitcher for clean drinking water.
- 3-7 days worth of food for each person (again — don't forget pets! Cat parents — grab extra kitty litter).



STEPHEN M. DOWELL/ORLANDO SENTINEL (ABOVE); FILE PHOTOS (BELOW)

Hurricane food safety by the numbers

- 4 hours: the amount of time a refrigerator will keep food cold.
- 24 hours: the amount of time a half-full freezer will hold its temperature.
- 48 hours: the amount of time a full freezer will hold its temperature.
- 40 degrees and below: the temperature a freezer item should still be at to be refrozen. If it still has ice crystals, it's also safe.

More food safety tips

- Don't taste a food to determine if it's gone bad. If you're unsure of it, throw it out.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.

Food items to store

- Tough-skinned fruits and vegetables: Citrus, carrots, apples, avocados, etc. Wash and dry them before the storm.
- Protein-rich foods: Peanut butter, protein bars, unsalted nuts, trail mix, beans, etc.
- Smoked or dried meats and hard cheeses. (Nonperishable and goes well with a glass of wine!)
- Instant drinks: Shelf-stable milk, instant coffee and tea.
- Comfort foods: Cookies, hard candy, chips, crackers.
- Canned items: Meats, fruits (in juice), vegetables, soups, stews and chilis.
- Condiments: You're going to need them to spice up those canned vegetables! Snag some hot sauces, mustard, oil and vinegar.

Gather cooking tools

- A manual can opener, appliance thermometer, pans or sheets that can be used on a grill, oven mitts, matches, cooking tools, grill fuel, moist towelettes, paper towels, gel fuel such as Sterno, a grill light or flashlight designated for cooking, pet food, paper plates and plastic utensils.

Post-storm grilling tips

- Never use a grill inside a house.
- Make sure your grill is a few feet from your home and far away from awning overhangs, plants, etc. Never leave it unattended, especially around small children or pets.
- Use only approved accelerant fuels for charcoal fires — NOT gasoline.
- Charcoal briquettes need about 48 hours to cool before they're thrown out. Soak the charcoal in water before tossing.

Staff Report

